



"Landlords benefit from retrofitting apartments for the disabled. People with disabilities tend to be long-term tenants, because moving is so challenging for them."

## Dossier: Jackie Simon, GRI, Avery-Hess, REALTORS®,

Gaithersburg, Md. **E-mail:** [jackiesimon@airbridge.net](mailto:jackiesimon@airbridge.net) **Web:** [www.avery-hess.com/simon](http://www.avery-hess.com/simon) **Claims to fame:** In the early 1980s, Simon brought suit and won against a seller who wouldn't sell to a black buyer. Since 1988, when her son was in an accident that left him paralyzed, her advocacy efforts have extended to helping people with disabilities. **How she turns words into deeds:** Reminds those who try to discriminate against a buyer or seller that it's against the law and refuses to work with them. She won't advertise in newspapers that don't publish the equal opportunity logo and slogan. **Also involved in:** The Montgomery County Commission for People with Disabilities and the county's Human Rights Commission. Holds affordable housing meetings annually with representatives from concerned organizations to share ideas and resources.

# Widening access

Jackie Simon had been a fair housing advocate for more than 10 years, when, in 1988, her son was paralyzed from the neck down in a bicycle accident. Suddenly fair housing had become a personal issue.

Simon's son had a hard time finding a home that would accommodate a wheelchair. "Before that I hadn't really seen the impact of a disability," says the associate broker with Avery-Hess, REALTORS®, in Gaithersburg, Md.

After the accident, Simon testified before both houses of Congress in support of a bill to extend the 1968 Fair Housing Act to people with disabilities and families with children. The Fair Housing Amendments Act passed and was signed into law in 1988. But Simon's advocacy for the disabled was just beginning.

Soon, Simon began to receive referrals from her son's disabled friends and from groups that provide assistance to the disabled—40 percent of her business now comes from people with physical challenges. And she became determined to affect real change in the industry.

Simon convinced local MLS directors to add listing categories showing whether a property has accessibility features, such as wider doors and roll-in showers. And, she researched which houses, condos, and apartments in her county could be made accessible and spoke to the owners about making changes.

For salespeople, Simon created a continuing education program, which teaches participants how to accommodate clients with disabilities.

When attendees enter the class, Simon is sitting in a wheelchair. "Later, I stand up and ask them what they initially thought about me," she says. Her goal is to help salespeople overcome their awkwardness about working with physically challenged prospects.

Indefatigable, Simon is currently lobbying the local housing authority so all new homes will be "visitable." "My son can't always visit his friends, because he can't get his wheelchair through their doors," says Simon. "Imagine if your grandmother couldn't visit you because she was in a wheelchair or couldn't climb stairs."

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